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A NINETEENTH CENTURY VISIONARY

BY WILLIAM HERBERT HOBBS

AT the Second Conference of Paris, which followed those at Chaumont, Paris, and Vienna, the interrupted deliberations of the plenipotentiaries engaged in remaking the map of Europe after the defeat of Napoleon seemed to have come to an end. The League of Nations which was there considered was destined to be reconsidered three years later at a Conference at Aix la Chapelle and to take on with the Conferences of Troppau and Laibach in 1820-1821 a quite different aspect.

As understood today "The Holy Alliance" rather generally applies to this League of Nations after the original plan had gone on the rocks at the Conference of Troppau in the separation of the Eastern despotic from the Western democratic Powers which had taken part in its formulation. This division, representing an alignment which continued until the Crimean War, came about as soon as the guarantee of the *status quo* by support of "legitimacy" of rulers and their territorial boundaries had encountered the aspirations for human liberty made manifest by the Grecian uprising under Ypsilanti and by the liberation of the South American colonies of Spain under San Martin and Bolivar. The inheritance from these revolts were the Eastern Question in Europe and the Monroe Doctrine in America, the latter set up in opposition to the Holy Alliance by the United States upon the suggestion of and with continued support by the British Government. It has been well said by Professor Walter Alison Phillips, the eminent English historian and the author of *Modern Europe*, "The Holy Alliance, in its inception at least, was coloured by a lofty idealism, and it ended by stinking in the nostrils of all lovers of liberty."

Alexander I, the author of *The Holy Alliance*, was the Autocrat of All the Russias and an egotist of inordinate vanity clothed in a particularly sanctimonious garb, in short, a prig. When indignantly denying to Metternich the rumors that he had been meditating a separate understanding with the enemy, he declared: "You know, that I am scrupulous in everything. I am equally so in politics. My conscience will always prevent my committing voluntary errors." Great Britain's representative at the Conferences, Lord Castlereagh, believed Alexander to be sincere. "It is impossible," he wrote, "to doubt the Emperor's sincerity in his view, which he dilates upon with a religious rhapsody. Either he is sincere, or hypocrisy certainly assumes a more abominable garb than she ever yet was clothed in"; and he tells how Alexander, placing "his hand upon his heart and looking up to heaven, declared that, actuated, as he trusted, by a religious and conscientious feeling, he had that secret sentiment within him which would render it impossible for him to be inequitable and unjust."

Metternich, on the other hand, regarded Alexander's liberalism, like his evangelical professions, as merely a mask to disguise his perfidy. It was said of Alexander by his intimate adviser, the Prince Adam Czartoryski, that "he loved phrases for their own sake," that he "would willingly have consented that everyone should go free, on condition that everyone should do his will alone," and that his thesis was magnanimity, upon which he dilated even when the whole trend of his policy was in the diametrically opposite direction. His treatment of Poland, the "Shantung" of the Congress of Vienna, will ever remain as a convincing proof of the justice of this verdict. "Rightly or wrongly," says Phillips, "his reputation for truthfulness was not of the highest and appearances were against him." Of the Congress of Vienna Gentz, its secretary, wrote that there were "sovereigns negotiating in person, some of them as though they were their own prime ministers," and he added, "The Key to the Congress is given by the entire lack of any plan, the preponderance of the Four Powers, and the frequent misunderstandings between them."

Alexander was thoroughly convinced that a panacea could be found for all the ills of the State, and he believed

"that sacramental phrases were sufficient to cause every kind of difficulty in practice to disappear." For his intimate associates and advisers he selected the most pronounced radicals. La Harpe was a Jacobin of the Revolutions in Paris and Switzerland, and this confidential adviser the Tsar chose to have with him during the advance upon Paris and at the Congress of Vienna. Other radical favorites sent to foreign courts on various missions were the source of serious and most embarrassing situations for their master.

In his tenderness for Napoleon the Tsar was the cause of serious difficulty for the Allies, and it was mainly due to him that the defeated conqueror was left where he found it easy to make his escape and again bid defiance to Europe. "Voices, indeed, were heard," says Phillips, "in criticism of the impolitic generosity which left to Napoleon his title and established him, with plentiful funds and the nucleus of an army, in an independent principality close to the coast of Italy where Joachim Murat, king of Naples, was playing a dubious game."

Two months before the fall of Paris, Castlereagh had commented on the *chevaleresque* spirit in which the Tsar was conducting the war. The plans of the Allies were much disconcerted because of the insatiable ambition of the Tsar to enter Paris at the head of his Guards, and he insisted that he should head a triumphal procession up the Avenue of the *Champs Elysees* and under the *Arc de Triomphe*. Phillips adds that the "proceedings of the 'legitimate Emperor' soon began to be almost as disconcerting as those of the rival he had overthrown. For the moment there was no one in Paris to dispute his supremacy, and he showed a disquieting disposition to play the part of Providence in France with little regard for the views of his Allies. Sir Charles Stewart, writing to Lord Bathurst, complained that Alexander was coquetting with the defeated enemy, and Phillips says that there rose before the eyes of the other Allies the "nightmare vision" of a new alliance of the autocrat with the enemy, "in which the visionary Autocrat of All the Russias would figure as the patron of the Jacobinism of France and all Europe." Castlereagh wrote to Lord Liverpool, "He ought to be grouped, and not made the sole feature for admiration;" and with much success, aided by Metternich, he carried out his purpose. Diplo-

macy was all that was required to prevent the great ambitions of Alexander passing from the world of dreams into that of action.

The Tsar's dominating position is easily understood when one considers that in the struggle against Napoleon which had now ended in his defeat, Alexander had entered late, his fresh armies had suffered little in comparison with the others, and as a consequence they were mobilized in great force. He represented, therefore, among the Allied Powers the only one still unexhausted, and there was a fear of offending him and rousing his stubborn temper. It was the role of Castlereagh, Great Britain's representative at the Congress, to play upon the autocrat's vanity and by a clever use of language to arrive at compromises which, while seeming to approve of his lofty and impractical schemes, yet in reality robbed them of their importance. The arch intriguer, Metternich, from somewhat different motives, co-operated in this, as did Talleyrand in his clever use of the principle of "legitimacy." Through their joint efforts The Holy Alliance, from having been originally a dream of Utopia became ultimately the facile instrument of a group of despots bent upon suppressing the aspirations for human liberty which later brought on a period of revolutions in Europe and the attempt to set up representative forms of government.

In forcing upon Europe his plan for a League of Nations the autocrat of the nineteenth century was not inspired by any desire to express the will of his people, for his plan was abominated by all his advisers without exception; and to have put through the half measure of an independent Poland which the Tsar originally advocated, would have cost him his throne and probably his life. Castlereagh wrote home that Alexander had ceased to be guided in the question of Poland by his regular servants. "It is unfortunately," he wrote, "his habit to be his own minister, and to select as the instrument of his immediate purpose the person who may fall in most with his views."

The diplomats of 1815, unlike those of 1919, addressed themselves first of all to the immediate task of making peace, and took up the future arrangements for universal and perpetual peace for the world at the Second Conference of Paris after the terms of peace with the defeated enemy had

been decided upon. Alexander afterwards declared, however, that he should have put forward his plan for The Holy Alliance at the close of the Congress of Vienna, but for the interruption caused by the return of Napoleon from Elba. The defensive alliance of the Great Powers which in 1919 was placed last upon the program, was in the nineteenth century put first. On December 30, 1813, a treaty of alliance was signed on the part of the Allied Powers which was "not to terminate with the war, but to contain defensive engagements, with mutual obligations to support the Power attacked by France with a certain extent of stipulated succours. The *casus foederis* is to be an attack by France on the European dominions of any one of the contracting parties."

The policy of the British Government with reference to the scheme of The Holy Alliance was to yield on unessentials, to flatter the vanity of the autocrat, while standing strongly for the defensive alliance against France, and, most important, to secure the material benefits of the peace arrangements. As a consequence Great Britain, exhausted though she had been by the long struggle, emerged from the Peace councils enormously strengthened in imperial power, and Castlereagh and Wellington became practically the arbiters of Europe.

Three years after the Second Conference at Paris The Holy Alliance was again taken up for consideration by the Powers at the Conference at Aix la Chapelle, where in the language of Gentz was made "the last attempt to provide the transparent soul of The Holy Alliance with a body." The test came, as it was bound to come, in the attempt to maintain the *status quo*, which Talleyrand had cleverly expressed as "legitimacy," a principle which guaranteed to existing sovereigns their thrones, no matter how much their prerogatives were being abused. In 1820 came the attempt of the Greeks led by Ypsilanti to throw off their oppressors the Turks, and it was one with which Alexander would naturally have been in sympathy upon religious and other grounds. Moreover it appealed strongly to the sympathies of the Russian people. Alexander had, however, committed himself to and had loudly proclaimed the principle which required intervention to assist legitimate sovereigns against their revolted subjects, and in denouncing

Ypsilanti for claiming Russian support he with one stroke removed whatever chance for success the revolt had had.

Not only in the East, but across the ocean to the westward peoples were struggling for liberty and in open revolt against their tyrants. The Spanish colonies in South America were one after the other throwing off their yokes, and though not at first directed against the monarchy of Spain, the War for Independence which later developed and ended in 1824 did assume that attitude. The British Government supported the United States in its recognition of the liberated peoples, they gave us the idea of the Monroe Doctrine, and they have consistently supported it throughout by their enormous prestige. The autocratic Eastern Powers, Russia, Austria and Prussia, adhered to the fundamental principle of the League of Nations, thus breaking up the original Holy Alliance, and it is to these despotic Powers which remained after Britain's secession, to which the term "Holy Alliance" is now most frequently applied.

The preamble of The Holy Alliance runs that the Emperors of Austria and Russia and the King of Prussia "in the name of the Most Holy and Indivisible Trinity, . . . solemnly declare . . . their fixed resolution, both in the administration of their respective States, and in their political relations with every other Government, to take for their sole guide the precepts of the Holy Religion, namely, the precepts of Justice, Christian Charity and Peace, which far from being applicable only to private concerns must have immediate influence upon the counsels of Princes and guide all their steps as being the only means of consolidating human institutions and remedying their imperfections." A modern historian of repute reviewing the past feels constrained to say, "It was most certainly not consciously a conspiracy against popular liberty."

Writing before the Great War in 1914, Walter Alison Phillips declared of the "sublime conception" of Alexander, "the visionary good in the pursuit of which he had neglected his duties to his own people, had proved itself the stuff that dreams are made of;" and he added of the Peace Leaguers of that time:

The new Holy Alliance of which the pacifists dream would be faced by very much the same problems as those which confronted Alexander and his Allies. They, too, purpose to establish their international system on the

principle of the preservation of the *status quo*—indeed, there is no other practical principle conceivable; they, too, would apply the principles of the Troppau Protocol by empowering the Universal Union, in the event of any state violating, or threatening to violate, the public law of the world, to bring it to reason by peaceful means, or if need be by arms . . .

The formation of a new international confederation would again be, like that of The Holy Alliance, to protect these artificial boundaries; to attempt, that is to say, to stereotype political systems with which, certainly in many cases, the people who live under them are not content. The attempt would be even less likely to succeed now, when the spirit of nationalism is strong, than a hundred years ago when it was in its weak beginnings.

A sentence from the Troppau Protocol which recorded the failure of the dream of Alexander says truthfully, "Nothing could be more immoral or more prejudicial to the character of Government generally, than the idea that their force was collectively to be prostituted to the support of established power, without any consideration of the extent to which it was abused."

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